# WORKPLACE OSTRACISM: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF GENDER DIFFERENCES ON JOB PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

*Purpose – Workplace ostracism has defined as a feel of being neglected or kept out at workplace. While many studies are carried out to look into the outcome of ostracism, there are limited studies on how employees feel while working in small groups. It also includes details regarding the causes and impact of workplace ostracism, initiatives taken by Indian organisations, the best method followed in the industry as a preventive step/action with regards to workplace ostracism, impact on social interaction and also how workplace ostracism leads to an impact on Job Performance.*

*Design/methodology/approach – The study involved a literature review to examine the concept of Workplace ostracism and its impact. The research involved seeking responses on the questionnaire form of three different levels of employees. The data was analysed using SPSS tool for examining the validity of the scales and testing the hypothesis developed based on review of literature.*

*Findings – The resulted revealed the Workplace ostracism impacts job performance and the influence was higher on male employees when compared with female employees.*

*Practical implications – The study presents a practical perspective on the impact of workplace ostracism and suggests some strategies to deal with them.*

*Originality/value – Many researches have revealed the significance of ostracism, but less attention was paid to workplace ostracism. Therefore, the current study focuses on workplace ostracism and how it influences employee performance.*

*KEYWORDS – Workplace Ostracism, Job Performance, & HR Practices*

*Original Article*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace Ostracism is defined as a feeling of being avoided, experienced by any employee at workplace. This feeling can have negative or positive effects on the job performance of the said individual, mostly it has a negative impact. In this research, we will attempt to understand how and why workplace ostracism affects the job or workplace engagement of any employee. Workplace ostracism can be defined "as a kind of interpersonal mistreatment resulting in negative work-related consequences among employees' such as attitudes towards work, reduced job satisfaction, higher intent to leave, emotional exhaustion and psychological distress (Ferris et al., 2008; Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012)."

When the employees are ostracised, they feel avoided from interacting socially with their colleagues and therefore they may have less or no knowledge of how the organization runs (Jones et al., 2009). The employees feel

excited to perform certain job tasks only when they think that their colleagues are encouraging and include them in everyday interactions (Quinn et al., 2012; Williams, 2007). This is affected when the employees think that they are being avoided by other individuals in the team (Wu et al., 2012). The employees who think they are being ignored do not contribute their ideas towards the organization goals and also, they may not gain relevant peer knowledge (Twenge et al., 2007), this may hold their capacity to rely upon their colleague's skill bases when attempting to meet their own job performance targets (Jones et al., 2009). On the other hand, when the employees feel that they are involved in conversations and meetings, then they will have significant peer knowledge, which may help them to successfully meet their job responsibilities, instead of just being diverted by negative thoughts and feelings (Jones et al., 2009). There is a high possibility for workplace ostracism to be the reason for employee's turnover aim (Haq, 2014), therefore it is important for the organization to pay attention to it. Wu, Liu, Kwan, & Lee (2016) says that every organization should encourage or motivate cooperation, communication and increased support, because this may help in reducing the probability of social ostracism.

Many research has revealed that ostracism is considered a significant social phenomenon that essentially impacts the way in which individuals treat and are treated by others (Williams, 1997, 2001, 2007). In spite of the significance of ostracism, less attention has been paid to workplace ostracism. Initial evidence recommends that Ostracism has an adverse impact on both the organisations as well as the employees. It influences the employee's morale which in turn influences their job performance and finally the profits of the organisation. If this is not taken care of properly, it can also lead to high employee turnover, lack of job satisfaction among employees, enhanced power distance gap, eventually affecting the organisations in all bad ways.

## 1.1 Need of the Study

Workplace ostracism has merged as one of the key factors that creates a negative impact on the overall cognitive and mental health of employees. This can be detrimental to the organization and the employees. It also influences the willingness of the employees to demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviors which motivate employees to go beyond their job description and help manage change. Workplace ostracism can impact physical health and cause psychological difficulties leading to conflicts in the organization (Choi, 2020; Wu, Yim, Kwan, and Zhang, 2012 Zheng, Yang, Ngo, Liu and Jiao, 2016). There is a need to examine the impact of Workplace ostracism on employee performance as in addition to performance, it impacts self-perception, job satisfaction, commitment to the organization and perception of justice. There is a need for organisations to look at different ways to minimize the negative consequences of ostracism (Howard, Cogswell & Smith, 2020).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The recent years have witnessed digital transformation and technological advancement in organisations. However, little effort is taken to identify engagement levels and examine the impact of Workplace Ostracism. Studies have indicated that for the sake of being accepted in the organisation, workplace ostracism can enhance employees' prosocial behavior in order to benefit other employees and the workgroup (e.g., Derfler-Rozin, Pillutla, & Thau, 2010; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Previous studies have shown that excluding or ignoring an employee may avoid negative emotions and may enable other employees to avoid conflicts (Hales, Williams, Kassner, & Graziano, 2016). Additionally, research on ostracism shows that it is considered as the most acceptable task by many employees instead of bullying or any other type of mistreatment (Robinson, O'Reilly, Berdahl, & Banki, 2015). The outcomes of ostracism for employees are more emotional

exhaustion, job tension, depression, less helping, worse job performance, less job satisfaction, commitment and engagement, and more turnover (Howard, Cogswell, & Smith, 2020). The employees who have vertical mobility should be given chance to develop their political and social skills, because this will help them in declining social ostracism at workplace Wu, Liu, Kwan, & Lee (2016). To gain more understanding on the area of Workplace ostracism, the current study was adopted. The findings of this research revealed that male employees are experiencing more ostracism when compared to female employees.

The theoretical explanation for the effect of Workplace Ostracism on Job Performance is explained by David McCelland's (1961) Theory of Acquired Needs that helps to understand the factors that motivate individuals. The theory explains how individuals prioritize their needs differently and the requirement for affiliation (n-Aff) drives social belonging and the requirements to be included. Individuals develop these needs through their culture and life experiences and this possess personal relationships with others manifests in the form of engagement at workplace.

Workplace Ostracism at any organisation can occur due to numerous reasons. In spite of the fact that examining every one of them is beyond the realm of imagination, we should begin by understanding at least a couple of common causes that add to Workplace Ostracism. Higher responsibilities on some individual in particular or a gathering in the organization can prompt the individual to be stressed with his own work and get unknowledgeable about the other employees around him or the work environment around him. This can make him being isolated from the other employees or even the other employees may feel deserted by him (Qian, Yang, Wang, Huang and Song, 2019). Most of the time, in the organisations, when mass recruiting happens, especially for entry-level jobs from campus hiring's from colleges. In such circumstances, individuals who already knew one another from their previous institute of recognition will in general remain together. At that time, when these groups are formed, they close themselves from the other individuals in the organisation and thus make it difficult for other individuals to interact with the group members. These situations also result in workplace ostracism for the members outside this group. Preconceived notions otherwise called perceptions play a major role in influencing workplace ostracism. Past impressions of employees or the ones that tend to happen after the first meeting create an impact on the perception of employees about each other. If the perception happens to be on the negative side during the first meeting it can likewise be one of the reasons for workplace ostracism. The Human Resources team of any organisation plays a crucial role in making employees feel involved and welcomed as a part of the organisation. In any organization, the HR team can initiate a culture of inclusiveness for helping employees using various initiatives and daily interactions. If the organization fails to initiate such a welcoming and inclusive environment then it can result in workplace ostracism (Fiset, 2014; Cogswell, Howard and Smith, 2020).

In light of the above findings the proposed hypothesis are mentioned below:

*H1 - Ostracism has a negative impact on Job Performance*

*H2 - Gender moderates the influence of Ostracism on Job Performance*

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

Using the survey method, data was gathered from 95 respondents and Linear Regression analysis on the same was done using SPSS. Among 95 respondents, 53 were male, 43 were female and 1 preferred not to say. The age range of the respondents was between 18 – 48 and there were 51 entry-level employees, 38 mid-level employees and 8 executive or top

management level employees. The educational qualification of the respondents was high school/diploma, graduate and postgraduates.

### 3.2 Measures

The Scales to measure the constructs were developed based on existing scales. Workplace Ostracism was measured using a modified nine items scale based on the scales used by Wu *et al.* (2012) and Ferris et al. (2015). Job performance was measured using a six items scales developed by Williams and Anderson, (1991) and modified by Muhammad, Inam & Azeem, De Clercq, Dirk & Ul Haq (2018) to examine how confident an employee is at the workplace.

### 3.3 Scale Reliability and Validity

To examine the reliability of the scale, each scale's item-total correlations were analysed. Cronbach's alpha was measured to evaluate the scale reliability, and since both the scales showed good reliability with the value of >.70, all the items were retained. By examining the correlations between the new scales developed, the simultaneous validity of the measures was evaluated.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Primary Analysis

The Kaisen – Meyer Olkin Measure was applied in SPSS in order to understand the sufficiency of data. The result of the said test was 0.693 which shows that factor analysis can be meaningful for the given data. Barlett's test of sperity was undertaken in order to understand the redundancy in the variables, the test result was Significance - .000 (Not much significant redundancy in data). To look at the co-relation between the two variables and the extent to which the total variation of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable, the linear regression analysis model was computed. The R value in the table below represents the simple correlation and is 0.281 which indicates a significant and moderate degree corelation. The findings indicated that Workplace Ostracism as a predictor of employee performance explained 7% of variation in the model. Hence, it can be inferred that workplace ostracism has around 7% impact on the job performance of the employees.

**Table 1: Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | R Square (Adjusted) | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-----|----------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .281 [a] | .079 | .069 | 1.95 |

a.          Predictor : Workplace Ostracism

### 4.1 Hypothesis Testing

To test our hypothesis and identify the impact that workplace ostracism makes on job performance, the statistical significance of regression model was computed. The following ANOVA Table (Table No.2) reports how well the regression equation fits the data and predicts the impact on job performance and also test if there is a significant difference between the two samples.

**Table No 2. : ANOVA Table**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 30.477 | 1 | 30.477 | 7.985 | .006[a] |
| | Residual | 354.955 | 93 | 3.817 | | |
| | **Total** | **385.43** | **94** | | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Workplace Ostracism | | | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: Job Performance | | | | | | |

As outlined in the above table, the significance value of F statistic is less than 0.05, which implies that the variation explained by the model is not because of the chance. In view of this analysis, t-Test was used to test the hypothesis. The aim of measuring the independent samples t-Test is, to compare the mean values of the two independent groups and to determine if there was any statistical evidence of difference in terms of the impact of workplace ostracism and Job Performance between Female and Male employees. Table No. 3 presents the analysis of the descriptive statistics and also compute the group means.

**Table No. 3: T- Test**

| Hypo | Independent | Dependent | Beta Value | T | Sign | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Workplace Ostracism | Job Performance | -.281 | -2.826 | .006 | Accepted |
| H2 | Workplace Ostracism (Male) | Job Performance | -.320 | -2.386 | .021 | Accepted |
| | Workplace Ostracism (Female) | Job Performance | -.246 | -1.606 | .116 | |

The t-value of -2.826, shows a negative effect of Workplace Ostracism on Job Performance. The findings show that Workplace Ostracism has a significant impact on Job Performance. Hence, Hypothesis 1 is accepted indicating that employees feel isolated and experience psychological discomfort, they feel less confident at workplace and contributing by their ideas. The findings also accept hypothesis 2, because of the evidence for a difference in the impact of Workplace Ostracism on Job Performance between the two genders. While the impact is higher among male employees, there is no significant impact on the performance of female employees. Hence it could be inferred that gender moderates the influence of ostracism on job performance. The findings are in accordance with Cogswell, Howard, and Smith (2020) indicating that there is a need for organisations to pay attention to employee engagement and that Ostracism can lead to negative outcomes which can impact an organisation's ability to meet customer expectations, retain their market share and profitability.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

The study had three major goals. The first was to examine the factors that contribute to Workplace Ostracism based on existing studies. The second goal was to examine if it impacts Job Performance in the context of working in small Organisations where the need for bonding and group dynamics is higher. The third goal was to examine if gender differences had an impact on the impact of Workplace Ostracism on job performance. The findings indicate that when employees feel ignored and unnoticed at workplace, they experience higher Ostracism. This has a negative impact on their job performance. Being ignored emerged as the most important aspect at the workplace. Based on the literature review as well as the current study it is identified that the mental health and wellbeing of the employee is very important.

Gender has been frequently examined in the context of Ostracism. Female employees experience less impact on their job performance. This could be clarified using the fact that female employees are being stereotyped (Cortina, Rabelo,

& Holland, 2018) or ignored by male employees especially in high context cultures like India. The high-power distance (Hofsetde, 2001) in India develops a mindset among female employees to accept power unequally and be differentiated based on gender.

Organisations can undertake initiatives to reduce Workplace Ostracism and provide a positive and healthy working environment by carrying out employee engagement programs, encouraging employee networking, and reducing the power distance in the organization. Right from the Induction session when the employees join the organisation, there must be an emphasis on team building and communicating about cultural values and mission of the organization. A structured mentoring or buddy system can help reduce Ostracism and create a more conducive work environment. Most important a supportive work culture in the organisation that promotes higher engagement and psychological safety at work can help firms reduce the impact of Ostracism. The need to address this issue is growing with increasing diversity and the trend of remote working (Choi, 2020).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this current study show that ostracism has a significant negative influence on the job performance of the employees. Employees that face ostracism feel confident to achieve job outcomes. The study has established that ostracism negatively influences the overall motivation to perform, their well being and self-perception. Gender plays an important factor that impacts the level of ostracism and its influence on job performance. Workplace ostracism contributes to satisfaction a feeling of self-esteem and hence motivates employees through the satisfaction of the need of affiliation and belongingness. In the current situation when employees are working remotely, there is a need for organisations to revisit strategies to engage employees National Culture plays an important role as it affects, the way relationships are built and members communicate with each other. The need for affiliation drives certain motives and impacts work performance. Hence, ostracism requires the attention of the employers, if it is avoided, then it can be harmful to the organization's effectiveness; (lower confidence among employees) and hence, it can lead to interpersonal conflicts. So, it is necessary that employees feel included and welcomed. To make the employees feel involved in the organization and also to help improve the progress of the organization, the HR team must take some small initiatives.

As with any other research, our study has a few limitations. The study was part of a Summer Internship and hence the sample size is small. The study could be carried out with a larger sample size with more variables. In the current environment of diversity and inclusion, there is a need to further examine the impact of ostracism at the workplace in a different and inclusive workplace to make employees have a feeling of being valued and safe. There is a need to integrate cultural variables to get a deeper understanding of the influence of job performance and ostracism. The current study only examines the influence of workplace ostracism on job performance. Other factors like intention to leave or behavioral aspects could be examined.

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